

No. 54.

Infinite LOVE

AND

Endless Punishment,

OR

The Infinity of God's Love,

A WARRANT FOR THE ENDLESS
PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

BY THE

Rev. ISAAC V. BROWN, D. D.

PHILADELPHIA:
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INFINITE LOVE AND ENDLESS PUNISHMENT.

It is generally admitted, that the theory of the divine government, so far as understood, is wisely planned, and well adapted to the proposed end. But many cavil at the practical working of the administration. The discontents assume different phases, as moulded by different tempers and circumstances. Some are based upon the apparent impression, that we are not always equitably or gently dealt with—that some of the provisions and measures of government are unnecessarily severe—that, in the management of affairs,

there sometimes appears, on the one hand, evidence of partiality and preference, and, on the other, symptoms of neglect or antipathy, towards certain classes or individuals, tending to impair confidence. And, say some of these objectors—"if we withdraw our view from all inferior objects and personal interests, and direct our eyes to the wide expanse of earth around and heaven above us, impressive exhibitions of arbitrary power, here too, strike our senses and inspire our fears."

The earth seems scarcely able to sustain the load of her crimes, of her guilt, and her sufferings. Revolutions and violence—murders and assassinations—thefts and robbery—fires, floods, and famine, are occurrences of every day. The migratory, capricious, and violent attacks of desolating diseases, depopulate growing towns, annihilate families, and almost exterminate communities; sometimes walking in darkness, then again scattering destruction at noon-day, with resistless power. Tumults and wars convulse and alarm—"the battle of the warrior is with confused noise and

garments rolled in blood"—volcanoes shake the globe, and from their bursting craters and fissures pour out consuming lava. Venomous serpents and savage beasts engross whole districts—mountains of ice from frigid climes, broken loose from their rocky moorings, seem commissioned by almighty power, to scour southern seas, and hurl the swift-winged packet, or more mighty steamer, in a moment of surprise and horror, from perfect safety and inapprehension, to a bottomless abyss. Human life, on a scale which defies calculation, from the violence of elements above us, calamities of seas and rivers, cars and engines, is a constant sport and irredeemable victim of misguided or uncontrollable power. If the government of the universe, asks the cool and audacious caviller, were indeed established in infinite wisdom, and administered in boundless goodness, combined with almighty power—could not the great King of nature and of grace easily devise and adopt a policy, which would remedy these appalling catastrophes and disorders throughout his dominions? We

are not of those who are disposed to discuss the question, whether the system of government, in operation over the universe, is the very best that could possibly have been devised. That is a question with which we have nothing to do, and, if we had, we should readily admit that we are totally incompetent judges of such a matter. As dutiful subjects of the universal King, we take things, and endeavour to understand and improve them, as they are presented to us.

The adorable Sovereign of the universe claims the prerogative of almighty power and absolute right—and, at the same time, he demands the respect and confidence due, not only to truth and justice, but to the most amiable and attractive attributes, *mercy and love*.

Now, some of his subjects are quite reluctant, and others utterly unwilling, to render to our exalted King, this high and honourable tribute. Amidst the dark scenes and apparently conflicting events often occurring, opposers allege, that they find it impossible to

suppress some rising doubts and fears, respecting the character of the divine law, and to maintain a uniformly unwavering faith and acquiescence.

This is a lofty theme, and it becomes us to approach it with awe. When we attempt to explore and analyze those objects, which lie close around us, and are subject to our most familiar inspection, we are soon stopped by opposing obscurity and doubt; but when we turn off our thoughts from this world, and lift them to heavenly objects, and to spiritual realities, around the throne of our immortal King, we seem to be approaching an august and magnificent temple; and with our feeble energies, striving to resolve into its original elements, a structure, which, in its awful majesty and grandeur, fills the heavens with wonder, baffles the powers of angels, and commands feeble mortals to *be still and know* that it is the lofty, incomprehensible, and unapproachable dwelling place of infinite majesty and glory.

If, to repress and quiet the murmurs of

presumptuous objectors against the government and providence of God, we should allege that the evils and calamities of earth, from which men suffer and fear so much, are the result of moral evil which they have introduced into the world—the curse inflicted on account of human apostasy and transgression, which is the scriptural solution of the difficulty, they respond, with apparent confidence, “The calamities are too numerous, overwhelming, and long continued, to be justified, by referring them to the original apostasy of man and his actual transgressions;” and they ask with apparent triumph, “Why could not a mild and paternal monarch, who has all things at his command, and regards the happiness of his subjects, remedy these evils, by relaxing the rigour of his administration, towards the venial offences of his subjects, or by passing an act of general amnesty?”

To this appeal, which is really infidel and revolutionary, in the kingdom of God, no answer can be returned, at once rational in itself and satisfactory to the caviller.

In the midst of this unprofitable and unsatisfactory discussion, a book is presented to us of great antiquity, venerable in its character, purporting to have been contrived and substantially executed, in the council chamber of the eternal King—which, by the fulness of its evidence and convincing energy, challenges and in general inspires belief—investing him with the character of infinite amiableness and benevolence, indeed with all physical powers and moral attributes, that are necessary and sufficient to constitute absolute perfection.

And this same volume, in long continuation and in inimitable strains of eloquence and poetry, simplicity and beauty, describes the works and ways of God as seen in creation, which are so severely criticised by weak and vain mortals, as exhibiting features not only of majesty, wisdom, harmony, strength, and beauty, truly astonishing and deeply impressive, but sure marks of benevolence, of design, contrivance, adaptation, varied, extended, multiplied—evidently to carry out the exer-

cise of benevolence, in a magnificent tide of overflowing fulness: to glorify the character of God—to adorn the universe—to subserve the interests and happiness of guilty mortals—to mitigate, as far as possible, the ruins of their fall and degeneracy. And then, that every complaining mouth may be stopped, and every painful emotion soothed, this blessed book declares, on the authority of its Divine Author, in one laconic and emphatic sentence, the sum of all correct reasonings and teachings on this subject, that *God is love!* Now, how can we better satisfy ourselves on this interesting question than by, first, taking a practical survey of the character of God, as exhibited in the works of creation, of providence, and redemption, which is commonly called the *Argumentum a posteriori*, that we may see whether God has not left here a witness for himself, that he is good, notwithstanding the clamour of his foes.

First then, cast your eyes back to that period when the first exhibition of Divine love was given. When the wisdom of the infinite

God saw it most suitable, he began the manifestation of his benevolence. Prompted by a disposition to produce and diffuse happiness, and accounting this his glory, he exerted his *power*.

And behold the effects of love. The earth springs into being and appears everywhere covered with beneficence. Man sits on its throne, is endowed with reason, is crowned with innocence, exults in a pure sublimity of bliss, triumphs in an existence which shall never cease. The sun pours a flood of light by day: the moon and the starry hosts illuminate the night. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work." It is the work of divine love that the firmament exhibits: it is the glory of God's goodness which the heavens especially declare. His wisdom and his power which are there so conspicuously employed, were directed by benevolence: they were merely the instruments for effecting the purposes of his love. When God had finished his works and pronounced them very good, it

was doubtless chiefly intended as a declaration, that they were fitted to diffuse happiness and render praise to the goodness of their Maker. That *eulogium* bestowed on them, was the eulogium of a God well pleased at the prospect of this vast scene of felicity, risen at once from the blackness of darkness—from nothing into light and beauty, into life and enjoyment.

It would perhaps be doing injustice to this part of my subject not to mention, that the region of the sky, the firmament of the universe, is probably filled with innumerable multitudes of creatures, who rejoice in a pure blessedness; and that the shining worlds on high, probably raise the song of praise to the beneficent Sovereign. And he views these works with the eye, and superintends them with the hand of love. He sustains them in beautiful and advantageous harmony, and regulates the whole with unerring benevolence. He rejoices to diffuse happiness through his creation:—and to bring the subject home to ourselves as a generous benefactor, he con

tinues to make guilty mortals experience the benignity of his providence. He maintains in their energy the happy laws of nature, and disturbs them only for our good. His gifts are a multitude that can neither be counted in number, nor estimated in their value. His bounty is showered upon the earth more frequently than the rains, and encircles it more profusely than the vital air. It surrounds us in the night and shines upon us through the day. It accompanies, enriches, and cheers us through all our years.

That the production of happiness, and diffusion of it through all the ranks and orders of creation, must have been the chief aim of the great Builder, is obvious to every observer. How richly is this feature exhibited in our own natural organization ! Sum up, for a moment, the vast number, the variety, and the amount of our internal resources and capacities for enjoyment, the power of perception, the pleasures of imagination, of memory, of internal taste, of sight, of affection, of conscience, of beneficence, of hope, of desire, of

anticipation. The whole theory of our nature and its practical development, while in healthful and vigorous order, display astonishing skill and effort, to open sources and channels of delight. And all animated nature sympathizes in this exquisite mechanical adaptation to our enjoyment. The groves charm by their sweet minstrelsy at morn and eve. The fields, the air, the sea, by day and night, exhibit myriads of joyful participants and competitors, in this universal tribute to divine goodness. The world is a vast scene of delight, with few occasional interruptions, of living and unceasing joys. This is a rich and triumphant display of God's infinite and endless beneficence, of that irrepressible spring, desire, or impulse, to impart happiness ever triumphant in his nature. The inanimate world, too, lends its impressive confirmation to the same truth, that "God is love." What is the teaching of the sun, the moon, the stars—the beautifully arched and tinted rainbow, the lily and the rose—the gilded clouds that stretch along the margin of an evening sky? Surely these

must all be resolved into diversifications of divine skill and power, employed to open new sources of delight to the countless multitudes of intelligent beings, who on this theatre, looking upward, behold and admire, adore and rejoice.

But could we draw aside the curtains of these lower heavens, and extend our vision to those on high, where God is enthroned in light inaccessible and full of glory—what proofs of divine goodness should we there find—what magnificence of bounty should we discover in that palace of the King of kings, prepared for himself and his blessed servants! But why do I notice the dwelling or its splendors? I ought rather to say, let us join the songs of the great assembly of celestial inhabitants who triumph there, in most exalted pleasures! Let us ascribe to him blessing and honour, and all the praises due to goodness and love! And for ever blessed be his name, we have each of us a prospect, if we ruin not ourselves, of arriving at that blessed mansion, joining in those songs of praise, and for ever partaking

of that fulness of joy. Many of our race have already been wafted thither. Surprising indeed is the change from what they once were, to what they now are; but we too may hope to experience the same change, through the same surprising means.

What these means are, the Apostle Paul teaches us, in these remarkable words—"God is love." In the preceding verse he tells us, that the love of God was manifested towards us: because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. He repeats with emphasis, "Herein was love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." We cannot better illustrate the love of God, in the work of Redemption, than by following out the ideas here presented. The sacred penman seems animated with the subject, and to say—This alone is a sufficient proof that God is love. In this has he manifested his wonderful benevolence, in full lustre and energy. This is love itself, the substance, perfection, and splendor of it.

We loved not him—yet he loved us. We were enemies, we had lost his image, hated his perfections, despised his government, and broken his laws: yet, he took not vengeance on us, but sent his Son, his only Son, to become a Mediator of peace, to atone for our crimes, to offer himself a propitiation for our sins, to die that we might live, be delivered from everlasting bondage and be for ever blessed. This was indeed the most disinterested love: for God could not be profited by our love; he needed not our service; he was perfectly and independently abundant in glory. Our love could not benefit him; neither did we love him, yet he loved us. This was the most unmerited grace: for it confers the richest blessings on the most vile and unworthy creatures. It is, finally, the highest act of generous mercy; for it pardons the guilty, it sets condemned criminals free; and, at the same time, secures the honour of the divine government, and promotes the welfare of the system: it makes the children of wrath and heirs of woe, children of peace and heirs

of God, at its own expense, and, at the same time, to the brightening of the splendors of its glory.

In short, whether we consider Him in whom this love exists—his greatness, his exalted attributes, his complete blessedness; or the meanness of those towards whom it is exercised—his unholy, guilty, and hateful enemies—whether we reflect on the miseries removed—sin, guilt, and all the pains of hell, together with the favours conferred—the means of grace, the influences of the Holy Spirit, the renovation of the soul, the divine graces and virtues with endless life and joy in heaven—whether we consider these, or the means which this love has used to prepare the way, by which these miseries are remedied and these blessings secured—the labours, the teachings, the sufferings, the death of the Son of God—on every side this love appears immense and stupendous: it astonishes us by its grandeur and transports us by its beauty. At every glance, the profoundest admiration of God's wonderful benevolence glows in our bosom,

we are continually ready to exclaim—"God is love."

But it is, after all our efforts, little we can express or conceive of so vast an object. Its height and breadth, and length and depth, pass our knowledge and beggar our powers. If we make not light of the Son of God, if we accept the offered Saviour and his great salvation, we shall for ever increase in the knowledge and be for ever absorbed in the admiration of it. When the full assembly of the saints of all ages and climes, shall be collected on high, when it shall be remembered, that earth and hell, men and devils, were opposed to this salvation, that the approbation of divine holiness and justice was obtained only by the death of God's eternal Son, when mercy thus triumphs, followed by this shining and innumerable host of willing, glorified captives, the universe will be filled and perhaps made vocal with admiration. When deformed wretches shall put on the looks of beauty and be clothed with excellence; when the children of death exult in life and immor-

talities; when depraved polluted worms of the dust are transformed into angels of light, faultless in holiness, endless in existence, uninterrupted in praise, this will open wide all the mouths of gratitude, add new vigour to all the notes of thanksgiving, and make louder still the loud melody of adoration. Thus, the lustre of God's mercy and the brightness of his glory shall cover the heavens and fill immensity.

This brief statement of the *a posteriori* argument in favour of the love of God, drawn from this impressive diffusion of his goodness over all the works of his hands, ought to be convincing and satisfactory to every mind. To what other cause than love can be attributed, the wonderful exhibition which has passed before us, and stands out from age to age, the wonder and admiration of mankind? Had we space for more minute illustration, we could present most striking indications of design—preconceived contrivance and arrangement—disinterested, magnanimous benevolence, persevering effort in producing these manifesta-

tions, so rich and abundant, that wherever you put down your finger on the disk of the universe, you touch a letter in the divine motto, which emblazons the whole, "God is love." If there should occur a few scattering shades of darker hue in this heaven-illuminated and glorious diagram, they are only offsets, to exhibit other parts of the magnificent canvass in more splendid colours, or spaces left for the divine artist, at some future crisis, by a touch of his pencil dipped in celestial colours, to obliterate for ever the faint obscuration, by a substitution of more dazzling brightness, reflecting over the whole panorama of mercy, a visible impress of more majestic splendor and beauty.

II. Now, in the second place—the argument *a priori*, will, when briefly stated, as fully illustrate and confirm the exhibitions given of the Divine character presented in nature, and vindicate the features and acts of the Divine government over all things, as does the practical exhibition itself.

God is infinitely good. This is the senti-

ment of the human heart, as well as the dictate of inspiration. It is the voice of nature, and let us now see whether it is not the conclusion of enlightened reason.

We never find it said that God is wisdom, or power, truth, holiness, or justice, but love, goodness, or mercy. Into this all his perfections may be resolved. They are but the variety, the modifications of love, the same substance under different forms and aspects. They all tend to display the Divine benevolence, and to promote the welfare of the universe.

The same considerations which prove that there is a God of infinite perfection—existing by a necessity of his own nature independent and eternal, will prove that he is a being of infinite goodness and love. And if God be a being of infinite goodness and love, this love will predominate in his nature, in his counsels, in his plans, in his great measures of universal empire, in his acts of administration, in all their individual traits and combined operations. His moral perfections, his love, his

justice, his truth, which must act in unison, will give to his natural attributes of wisdom and power, their tendency and direction, as the will of man directs his corporeal and mental powers. And the same motives which make God approve of himself, delight in his own personal attributes, his goodness and love, will incline him to delight in beings morally constituted like himself, and lead him to desire and attempt the transfer, the formation and culture, the multiplication of such dispositions, tempers, actions, and characters through all his dominions, as harmonious with his own. His benevolence must prompt him to this course of action, believing as an infinitely great, wise, and perfectly benevolent Monarch, that it will, so far as realized, be the best and happiest policy for his moral subjects, and most glorious feature of his administration.

Now, just in proportion as he is holy, as he loves holiness, desires holiness to prevail, he will take measures to encourage and promote it. And the same feelings and views, which produce these results and movements, on the

part of the supreme moral Governor, will lead him necessarily to hate every thing opposed to the objects of his approbation and desire, and adopt measures to prevent their prevalence, and especially their preponderance in his kingdom, among his subjects. And here, the prohibitory feature of the divine government, which is so much complained of by refractory and rebellious objectors and cavillers, has its foundation and its origin. But none can be so blind and audacious as to deny, that it is good and benevolent in God, to make laws for the prevention of sin, disorder, and unhappiness in his kingdom. If it is right and proper for him to make laws for this end, then it is undeniably fit and proper that he should give character to the laws, and appoint sanctions to enforce them; and if his laws are broken, disregarded, and outraged, he has a right to carry out the prohibition to its proper results and inflict its penalty.

This is the theory of Divine benevolence, the programme of his sublime and universal administration. We have said that all the

perfections of Jehovah are fused, and merged, and commingled, in the vast and boundless sea of his love. Now, let us see how this love or benevolence of God in practice, will affect individually and collectively, the various natural and moral attributes of his nature. As soon as God resolves to act, his love springs into exercise as the governing principle or energy, in all that he attempts. And in effect, their great object and effort will be, to manifest the vast and inconceivable fulness of the Divine benignity and love. There will appear to be, as it were, a competition between the various perfections of the Divine Being, each striving to secure to itself the largest influence, the richest honour, and most pre-eminent claims to distinction and glory, and especially as connected with the controlling and directing influence of love.

According to this view, the Divine immensity will give extent to this benevolence, or rather leave it without bounds; his wisdom will give to it propriety and harmony, his almighty power, existence, energy, and effi-

ciency, in its exercises. Without immensity the displays of God's good will, would be confined to a limited space, and without eternity comparatively to a moment. Without power, his benign wishes would prove unavailing, and without wisdom, his beneficence might be ruinous. It is the union of all these which delivers the Divine love from all undue restraint, which gives to it infinity, and makes it the love of God. Shall we assist our ideas if we say, his spirituality is the refinement and exaltation, his omniscience, the all-seeing eye, his wisdom, the unerring sagacity, and his power, the omnipotent arm, the never ceasing activity of love, that immensity is the habitation of its greatness, the unbounded sphere in which it moves, and eternity, its never ending life?

His love, however, ought to be directed, as we have seen, by wisdom, and that wisdom calls to its aid, truth, holiness, and justice. These attributes tend invariably, like all the other Divine attributes, to the manifestation of the Divine benevolence, and to the welfare

of the whole system. For truth, justice, and holiness, all will admit, are reasonable in themselves; so must the exercise of them be. They are amiable in their own nature, and must be lovely in their consequences. It is suitable and excellent in God to love moral worth and to hate sin: and it must be so also for him to show his approbation of the former, and his abhorrence of the latter. Justice consists in rendering to all according to their deserts, or as the reason and relations of things require. And truth is the conformity of the divine word to reality: all evidently excellent and reasonable in their nature, and so also in the exercise of them; and if excellent on a general scale, then benevolent.

And, on the other hand, nothing is to be gained by relinquishing them. An infinitely wise and powerful being, can gain nothing by concealing his hatred of sin and his love of holiness, nothing by letting the criminal go free, and punishing the virtuous, nothing by deception, for he can accomplish all his purposes without it. However gracious his pur-

poses and extensive his love, he can fulfil the former, and manifest fully the latter, without resorting to such means. Nay such means would have a natural tendency, to defeat his benign intentions and to render his love pernicious.

All sin is in its nature productive of misery. Whatever tends to increase this evil, is entirely repugnant to genuine love. It combines with malevolence for the ruin of intelligent beings. But surely to show no displeasure against sin encourages it, letting sinners go unpunished, emboldens them, and seduces others to their crimes. Were even one of the creatures of God to manifest a total disregard to good and evil, the example might be attended with fatal effects. Probably the sin of one angel, was the occasion of bringing down legions from heaven to the regions of destruction. We know that a fallen spirit was the great instrument, in producing the apostasy of our first parents, which has rendered this earth a vast scene of ruin, and led to endless woe millions of guilty spirits; a

result, the enormity of which could be rectified only by a rigid adherence to holiness and justice, such a depravity and death as could be removed from none of our race, but by the death of the Son of God. If one creature could then by his example and conduct, produce so much misery, what would be the effect, should God himself, either sit in the heavens entirely regardless of good and evil, should he pay no attention to the acts of intelligent beings, or treat indiscriminately the good and the bad? If one member of the great family, has by deviating from righteousness and truth, brought depravity and ruin upon so many—should the parent of all *deviate*, whom all consider the perfection of moral excellence, the universal standard and pattern of virtue, what would be the result? If a citizen of the universe has been the instrument of spreading rebellion and misery through such multitudes, if Satan has probably by his example and conduct, diffused sin and desolation through the earth and heavens, how dreadful the consequences, should the governor of all display

no indignation against iniquity, but treat the criminals as if innocent? Would not the deadly contagion grow more powerfully infectious, and catch with increasing rapidity? Would not the mortal disease spread from one individual to a second, from one rank to another, from world to world, till the intellectual life and happiness of the soul, should be every where extinct?

For here, let me repeat, that for the preservation of order and the public good, among finite and imperfect, but active and intelligent beings, some rules of conduct to direct, some laws to restrain, and some sanctions to enforce those laws are indispensably necessary. But when the laws are broken with impunity, they become impotent, the government is without influence, and the ruler despised. If then, God, the governor of all worlds, after he has given his laws, after sanctions have been annexed, after his truth, his holiness, and justice have been pledged to maintain them—should permit the transgressors to go unpunished, instead of giving a warning against

sin, he would in effect invite transgression ; instead of checking its career, he would hasten and aggravate its progress, he would fall into contempt, and his subjects become rebels, disobedient to him, enemies to one another, and destructive to themselves. A state in which the laws are not executed, where criminals range unrestrained, and where anarchy prevails, is generally on earth a great scene of confusion, in which every man's hand is against his neighbour, and no one's property, character, or life is secure. Were the government then of the great King of heaven and earth unhinged, were he regardless of the crimes of his subjects, equally favourable to the guilty and innocent, his laws and authority would meet with insolent contempt, rather than respect ; his denunciations would appear more as the offspring of passion or rashness, than the cool decisions of wisdom and justice, and hence become the derision of abandoned offenders. And the same word which was violated when employed to deter from wickedness, would have little weight, when pretend-

ing to offer favours, or to allure to obedience by promises. There would be even reason to apprehend, that the same being, who made no discrimination between the guilty and innocent in one case, might in another inflict those evils on the latter, which the former deserved. The prince who chooses his favourites from the licentious, cannot endure the virtuous near him. They are in danger of experiencing the destructive effects of his wild caprice and ungoverned passion. So also, were God to relinquish his truth, holiness, and justice, his omnipotence might justly fill the universe with fearful apprehensions. The foundation of all hope would be gone from beneath the innocent themselves, and their expectation of Divine favour, rest upon a basis fluctuating as the waves of the ocean. The drawn sword would hang over the heads of human creatures, as by a single hair, but no one could tell when it would fall: the thunder of almighty power would continually roll on high, but none could tell where the lightning of Divine wrath would strike.

Finally, should God relinquish his holiness, his truth, and justice, sin would be let loose unrestrained; it would kindle a tormenting fire in every bosom and set the world in flames. Every one might probably become a foe to himself, and a fierce fiend to all around him. The gates of hell would be opened wide, and the murderous hosts imprisoned in darkness freed from their chains, to spread confusion and death wherever they ranged. Thus truth, holiness, and justice are so far from being opposed to love, that love cannot exist in God without them. Without them, his goodness would become a pernicious prodigality, and his mercy destructive cruelty, his government anarchy, his work a chaos, and the whole creation a hell.

Thus have we taken notice of such of the Divine perfections, as might seem repugnant to the doctrine that God is infinitely benevolent, and good, or love itself, and we have found them all lovely and beneficial. So that, even should God be clothed in terrible majesty, be surrounded with indignation, and

send forth destruction, it is not the less true that he is love : but rather affords more abundant evidence that he is so.

A few observations will bring this illustration to a close.

1. This subject may administer instruction and reproof, to those who pretending to magnify the goodness and compassion of God, hope for impunity in their crimes.

Here they may discover, that while they would divest God of his justice and holiness, they would depose him from his throne, they would rob him of his majesty, they would change his goodness into a wasteful and pernicious extravagance, and his mercy into a degrading and destructive weakness : for

“A God all mercy is a God unjust.”

What ! shall a parent who ruins his whole family by indulging a licentious son, be charged as weak and criminal ? and shall it be accounted a laudable compassion in the great Father of spirits, to show indiscriminate favour to guilty, abandoned creatures ? Shall

a king who exposes to ruin, his subjects in general, to gratify a small rebellious portion, be pronounced a wicked tyrant? and shall the unerring Governor of all worlds, treat with ruinous lenity, criminals full of enmity and active rebellion, and yet be unimpeached? Impossible! his love to the great system over which he presides is indignation against all such. Ye deluded sons of men, demand from your fellow-men freedom from all government, from all law, and all punishment: let the parent no longer attempt to correct the errors of his child, nor the magistrate unsheath the sword of justice, and call it noble lenity, generous pity, but think not to escape the righteous judgment of God, insult him not with the praise of such goodness and mercy: for he has declared, that he will punish the wicked, and yet, that he is love. He knows well that justice and mercy must meet and harmonize in every act: and that truth, holiness, and justice, goodness, mercy, and love, all inseparably and indissolubly combined, encircle his

throne as a bright cloud, and together constitute his infinite and eternal power and glory.

2. Our illustration exposes the entire groundlessness of that hope of future life and happiness, which the Universalists, and more especially the Unitarians, seem to infer and to anticipate, from the natural goodness and mercy of God.

This latter sect, in particular, assume the existence of "an infinitely powerful, wise, and good being," whose essence they pronounce to be love; but their fatal delusion consists in attempting to draw from this fact the assumption, that none of the creatures formed by such a being, will be made eternally miserable, that the Divine benevolence will prevent this result, whatever their character and conduct may be.

This is a fallacy which they have created, to give themselves tranquillity in their sins, and a final refuge from guilt and punishment, after attempting to destroy the demerit of moral evil, and openly rejecting the Divine Redeemer. But this visionary and vain de-

vice, if realized, would unsettle and overthrow the Divine government: it would represent the infinitely wise and holy God, as so blindly attached and devoted to a rebellious portion of his subjects, that for their deliverance from deserved wrath, he would relinquish the demands of his laws and justice, relax and accommodate the energy of his government, to suit the depraved hearts and corrupt lives of hardened offenders; that he would open a door and invite transgression and disorder through all his dominions, rather than inflict the penalty of his violated law, and sustain the majesty and purity of his government, by enforcing its sanctions. Vice would then be stripped of its deformity, and fearfulness, and guilt, of its horrors; every restraint against sin and licentious disorder would be removed from the world.

The course of lenity and the final escape from condemnation, anticipated by the errorists, here referred to, is utterly inconsistent with the nature and perfections of God, and with the principles of eternal right and wrong.

The profound Bishop Butler argues very conclusively against their whole train of speculation. He maintains that goodness or love is the greatest and most just object of fear to an evil man. Love in the Supreme Being is a fixed, unchanging principle or perfection. God cannot change it without violating his nature. The same feeling which leads him to punish sinners and enforce law and government in criminal cases, would make God's love a terror to evil-doers, instead of encouraging them to do evil and to hope for pardon, or be at ease in sin. Under the government of a God of love, an administration founded on this principle or feature of character in God, there can be no hope for impenitent sinners, whilst God's perfections and the nature and reason of things remain the same.

Every man can perceive how much fairer the prospect is to the wicked, as to obtaining forgiveness and general indulgence, from a weak, partial, or capricious administration. The monarch's humours may change; his fickleness, his fluctuation and caprice of temper,

hold out some prospect of relief, from the stringency of law and justice : but the sinner is cut off from all hope, when perfect and unchanging goodness and love decide and proceed against him. The sinner's only hope of forgiveness and safety, is from the want of justice and uprightness in his judge. Socinians in their infatuation, have entirely mistaken their case : and instead of seeking out an escape or evasion of Divine justice and wrath while in sin, are merely preparing for themselves a more surprising and aggravated overthrow. The very love in which they found their hope of pardon and peace, will be their most formidable foe, and work out for them a sure destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power.

And when we consider the successive ages of time, the probable number of worlds, and certainly hosts of intelligent and immortal beings interested in this subject : when we solemnly consider the consequences, that would result from the introduction of such a relaxed and inefficient order of things, would

we not mourn over the change, and be ready to charge the author of this lowered and inefficient dispensation, with a dereliction of the essential principles of kindness, benevolence, and love? "God is love." And this alone will secure to his government, righteous laws, salutary sanctions, and inflexible firmness in judgment and retribution.

